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**TRABAJO DE FIN DE MÁSTER: MODALIDAD A**

**Lenguas Extranjeras: Inglés**

# HOW ENGLISH LANGUAGE IS LEARNED: *Learning to Teach*

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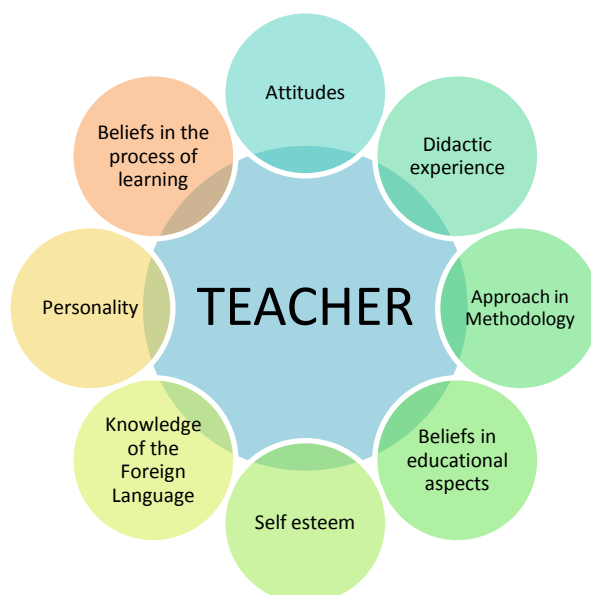
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## 1. INTRODUCTION: TEACHING AS A PROFESSION

The purpose of the Action Research Project (ARP) is that we, as students, will be able to make a reflection and synthesize about our learning process along the Masters Degree in Education regarding both the theoretical training and the practice application acquired in our Practicums (II and III). Therefore, the module ARP requires us to make an analysis of our training and value our preparation to get involved in teaching as a profession now that we understand the legal and institutional frame as well as the most appropriate methodology for teaching.

As far as I am concerned, the wide bibliographical selection of authors and pedagogues provided by our teachers – some of them are attached at the end of this paper – is extremely remarkable since it will foster not only our learning process but our training as teachers. We cannot forget that a teacher must be always in constant training, since this is a dynamic profession which requires constant renovation.

From what we have read and learnt throughout these months about teaching, we had come to our own conclusions about the inner difficulty of this profession and about which must be our role as teachers. There are significant factors that influence the teachers' performance: their personality, self-esteem, and didactic experience, methodological approach used in the classroom or the knowledge of the target language. All these factors will determine both their teaching practice and their students' acquisition of the English language.



*Graphic 1: Keys to be a good English Teacher (own elaboration)*

As we will see in the following pages, the methodology used by the teacher is basic. That is why teachers who think on their students as simple receivers, will adopt a teacher-centred methodology, while teachers who consider students as the own creators of their learning process will encourage autonomy and creativity, following a student-centred approach.

If the teachers' main purpose is that of teaching linguistic contents in order to prepare students to pass an exam, the way of teaching will be significantly affected. On the other hand, if teaching a foreign language is considered as an element that goes beyond the school stage and which has a wider social, cultural and educative implication, teachers will adopt an approach to develop learners' creativity and autonomy. Those teachers, who believe in the importance of the development of their students' autonomy, will have to grant them a privileged place in the classroom which will definitely contribute to boosting their self-esteem while making them more responsible towards the learning process.

Along this paper, we will reflect about which have been the different methodologies that have merged for foreign language teaching, and which approaches have been tested as the most appropriate for their application in the classroom. We will also see the importance of the curriculum and the year plan, and the teachers' role in the learning process.

At the end, we will analyze the development and implementation of two practical projects which we have carried out along the Masters in the modules *Curricular Design for Teaching English as a Foreign Language and Activities Design, Planning and Development: Course Plan and Learning Unit*. After analyzing them, we will discuss if they are following a communicative approach, if their content is suitable and if it would be feasible to develop them within a real learning context.

## 2. PROJECT SELECTION AND JUSTIFICATION

Learning a foreign language is such a complex and wide task that it might seem impossible to cover. Where should I start from? Which order should I follow?

Teachers do need to plan their work. Planning is essential in order to fulfil all the requirements stated by local and national laws, and to be able to adapt them to the teaching context. Known as didactic planning, it involves the cycle curriculum, year plan developed by the departments and the classroom plan made by the teacher day by day. Due to the importance of planning in the teaching practice, we have chosen the above mentioned activities in order to analyze and comment on them.

The Course Plan is the tool used to prepare, organize and plan each subject which is designed and adapted by the teacher according to the specific needs of the students s/he is working with (Aragón and Universidad 2013). As we could see during our teaching practice periods, its development is a complex task. We will talk about it in section 4. It is divided into **Units of Work** or **Learning Units**, which are also constituted by lessons. The Unit of Work we will comment on will give us an idea of the difficulties teachers face up when planning and of the importance of having planning capacities and abilities for a fine teaching practice. These two activities will also set the ground to talk about the importance of students' motivation. During their development we have realized how important is the fact of motivating students through activities such as the ones included in the Units of Work.

Finally, elaborating these Course Plan and Unit of Work has made us discover that organizing and planning is basic so as not to waste time. Besides that, we have noticed that you need to be flexible, too. Every teacher knows that flexibility is essential and that we usually have to leave the program aside in order to adapt it to the classroom needs. Both activities can be clearly included in the Communicative Language Teaching approach. This method states that so as to learn a language, it has to be used by means of meaningful tasks, the activities must encourage real communication and the language must also be meaningful. Why is this approach nowadays the chosen one to teach and learn English as a foreign language? To answer this question, we must know which have been the previous approaches in the history of teaching foreign languages. By having a look at the trends developed throughout the history we will be able to understand the current method which is included in the European Common Framework and in the Aragonese Curriculum.

Now, we will make a brief review on them.

### 3. EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

#### *3.1. Methodologies in Teaching Foreign Languages*

Along the Masters Degree we have been able to study and know which have been the different theories and methodologies in the teaching of foreign languages as well as their evolution from linguistic and psychological theories. We are going to analyze these methods briefly since - from their knowledge - we will be able to make a reflection about which is the most appropriate one in the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language.

**Behaviourism**, originated by Skinner in 1953, adapted to the pedagogical context, meant that the students were seen as passive entities, receptors who only received input, fostering their repetitive, rote-learning and monitored completely by

the teacher. From this point of view, the subject was taught without bearing in mind the students' needs or interests, not the individual features of their intellectual development. Teaching is understood as the teacher providing input to the learner and it was based on reinforcement, either negative (punishments, low marks, phoning families and so on) or positive (high marks, verbal stimuli, etc).

Behaviourism was applied in the teaching of foreign languages through the **Audiolingual method**, developed in the 1950s. This approach comes from a structural perspective of the language. Although it tries to avoid translation or the use of the mother tongue, it is based on imitation and constant repetition as well as the mechanization of structures, vocabulary and pronunciation.

According to Brown (1994) these are the key features of this approach:

- There is dependence on mimicry and memorization of set phrases.
- Structures are sequenced by means of contrastive analysis.
- There is little or no grammatical explanation. Grammar is learnt by inductive analogies.
- Great importance is attached to pronunciation.
- The mother tongue is not allowed.
- Right answers get a positive reward (prize) immediately.
- There is great effort to get students to produce error-free utterances.

The critics to this theory, which we agree with, are based basically on the fact that this method does not bear in mind that the language is, above all, linguistic interaction among human beings and historical, cultural and social contexts. An excessive use of repetitions destroys a person's ability to think and limits creativity and spontaneity. Repetition can be used extraordinary, for instance to reinforce pronunciation, but it always must be part of contextualized and meaningful exercises. Furthermore, mistakes and errors are not always related to bad habits but they are part of the natural process of learning. They are a means towards learning, a useful tool in the process of acquiring a language. Teachers must guide learners to make them able to identify their linguistic problems. Besides that, the use of reinforcements does not improve the learning process, not raises inner motivation.

During the 1970s, the theory of **Cognitivism** was developed in contrast to behaviourism and its idea is that a person learns as a response to stimuli. Bruner fostered this approach focusing on the inner processes that lead to learning. Cognitive processes stimulate the development of strategic capacities of the student who will therefore learn to solve problems and learn meaningfully. Meaning happens when the

contents are related to what the student already knows. That is, when the given ideas are linked to a person's previous knowledge, specifically relevant, of the learner's cognitive structure (Ausubel 1983). Meaningful learning is also associated with the fact that students can transfer what they have learnt to new situations when facing new situations. For cognitivism, students build knowledge from mental processes formed while meaning is inferred and hypothesis are formulated and tested from the information given (Muñoz 2010). Learning is therefore an active process in which the learner plays the main role while the teacher and knowledge play a secondary one. The student is considered an active agent who builds knowledge through direct contact with the object of study. The role of the teacher is that of facilitating learning and providing the student with the appropriate environment to get it.

From cognitivism, Vygotski developed another theory –**Social Development Theory**- in which mental activity, social concept and the influence of the social context were closely related to each other. Within the teaching process, the teacher's role is that of an advisor who helps students to discover their mental capacities. In the socio-constructivist pedagogy, teacher and learner play similar roles in the learning-teaching process. Teachers do not spread knowledge, nor train, nor teach, but direct and guide explicitly and intentionally (Muñoz 2010). From constructivism, some pedagogical theories were derived and successfully applied to the teaching of foreign languages. Next, we will approach to the most developed theories to the teaching of the English Language:

#### ❖ **Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)**

For instance, Communicative Approach involves this theory. It merged in the 1970s and its highest feature is to foster **communicative competence**. This concept comes from the sociolinguistic Hymes (1972) which was developed by Canale and Swain (1980) later. It states that the competent speaker is that able to use the language in the right way within the appropriate communicative situation. Therefore, this theory suggests a communicative definition of language, that is, the learning of a language has been productive when learners have to face up real situations where communication is needed. The teaching process must be involved in real communicative contexts by using the language in a real communicative way such as: asking for information, inviting, writing an email, buying a plane ticket, apologizing, and so on. This approach focuses on the four integrated skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing). Classes are centred on students, who are managers of their own learning.

According to Harmer (2007: 50), CLT has two main guiding principles:

-“The first is that language is not just patterns of grammar with vocabulary items slotted in, but also involves language functions such as inviting, agreeing and disagreeing, suggesting, etc. (...) CLT is not just about the language, in other words, it is about how it is used.

-The second principle of Communicative Language Teaching is that if students get enough exposure to language, and opportunities for language use –and if they are motivated- then language learning will take care of itself”.

According to Richards and Rodgers (2012) from the 1990s, new interpretations of this approach have appeared such as the following ones:

- ❖ **Cooperative Language Learning:** an approach to teaching that makes maximum use of cooperative activities involving pairs and small groups of learners in the classroom. CLL activities can also be used in collaboration with other teaching methods and approaches.
- ❖ **Content-Based Instruction:** teaching is organized around the content or information that students will acquire, rather around a linguistic or other type of syllabus. CBI is based on an assumption: “people learn a language more successfully when they use the language as a means of acquiring information, rather than as an end in itself” (Richards 2006: 28).
- ❖ **Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT):** TBLT is a natural extension of communicative language teaching, which takes CLT one stage further and uses tasks as the organising units in a curriculum. In TBLT, the emphasis is on the task rather than on the language. “For example, students perform real-life tasks such as getting information about bus timetables, or making a presentation on a certain topic. Later, after the task has been completed, they can look at the language they have used and work on any imperfections that have arisen, correcting grammatical mistakes or thinking about aspects of style” (Harmer 2007: 51).

According to Ellis (2003, quoted by Kumaravadivelu 2006: 64), “a task is a workplan that requires learners to process language pragmatically in order to achieve an outcome that can be evaluated in terms of whether the correct or appropriate propositional content has been conveyed”. Some of its proponents (e.g., Willis) present it as a logical development of Communicative Language Teaching. For example:

-Activities that involve real communication are essential for language learning.



-Activities in which language is used for carrying out meaningful tasks promote learning.

-Language that is meaningful learner supports the learning process. (Richards and Rodgers, 2012)

Besides the above mentioned methods, we have studied and discussed other methods along the Masters. That is the case of Humanistic Approaches (Suggestopedia, Silent Way, Community Language Learning, Total Physical Response) which are based on other theories of learning.

There are currently some linguistics who say that the concept of method is not as important; approaches are more important. In line to this principle, Kumaravadivelu (2012) claims that the **Post-Method theories** follow the development of a pedagogy that (a) is generated by professionals in the ground; (b) is sensitive to specific needs, desires and situations; (c) is based on experiences lived by learners and teachers; and (d) it is based on some organizational principles such as particularity and practicality. Particularity because a true understanding of linguistic, social, cultural, politics and educative particularities is necessary since they determine the learning and teaching process in a specific context; practicality because it means a real understanding of the pedagogical knowledge within the classroom, built by the teaching practice.

According to Kumaravadivelu, building a post-method pedagogy sensitive to the context is necessary. Any current post-method pedagogy must be developed by teachers through their ever-changing professional and personal knowledge. However, this new conception of teaching without a method can, for some teachers, lead to fear and distrust. It is true that every method has its limits and that some of them cannot be put into practice in every context. That is why, a lot of teachers are forced to follow an 'eclectic approach' that can be useful. But Kumaravadivelu claims that it is not easy for teachers to find an eclectic method which combines the features of method A, B or C. It is also difficult because the peculiarities of a learning/teaching context must be taken into account.

As we have seen, the reflexions about language and learning have developed into different didactic methods. Nonetheless, there are not unique, perfect or ideal methods to learn languages and the existing ones are not being implemented in the classroom in full. The theories on language learning –which we have briefly discussed in this section-, can help teachers when taking decisions in the classroom, such as, exposing students to an understandable, varied input while promoting real communication throughout the selection of relevant topics and activities.

Nowadays there exists a broad consensus between teachers and linguistics of the objective of learning-teaching foreign languages which must be guided towards the acquisition of a communicative competence. Nobody doubts about the importance of

the development of a communicative competence by learners (Canale 1983), which can be achieved by taking part in situations where an exchange of ideas is carried out, being exposed to significant uses of the language and providing conditions that are close to the natural acquisition contexts.

The most important fact is the output of students in the target language (Swain 1995). He states in his theory **output hypothesis** that through production, the learner starts a mechanism of producing in the target language different to that activated for comprehension, and that might be not necessary for the latter. Producing meaningful situations to use the language fosters oral interaction and encourages learners to try more and more complex productions which will become more and more fluent.

Once the most appropriate approach for the teaching of the English language in the schools has been set, we should verify if current legislation makes any reference to methodology. Which method is the one advised by the European guidelines to teach English as a foreign language? Does the Aragonese Curriculum compile any of these suggestions on methodology?

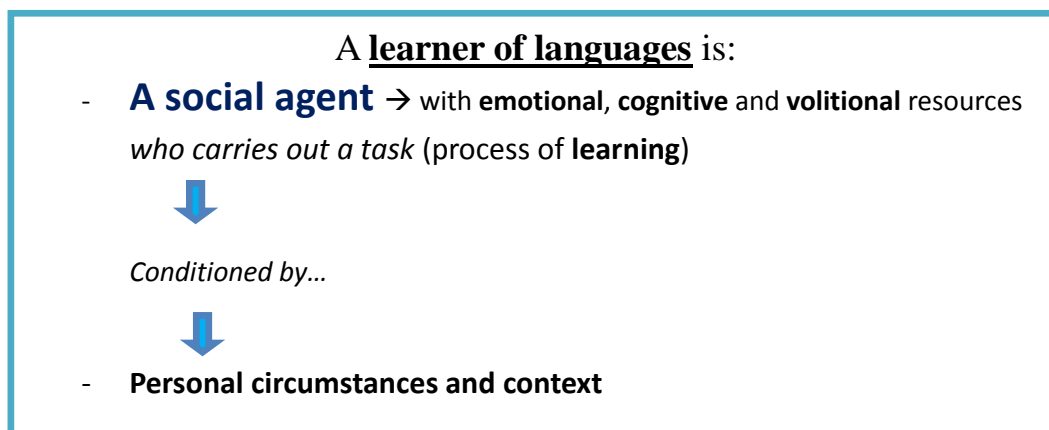
These questions will be answered in the following section.

### *3.2. Foreign Languages Teaching Legal Frame: Common European Framework of Reference for Languages; Aragonese Curriculum*

#### **3.2.1. Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR)**

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is a theoretical document, a guideline, which compiles the most relevant aspects for all the agents involved in the learning-teaching of foreign languages process, from students to teachers, assessors, and so on.

The development of this document started in 1990 and finished in 2001, when it was published, and has become a document of reference for learning and teaching foreign languages. Although several methodologies are involved in it, its theoretical ground is that of communicative competence and language in use. The CEFR bets for an approach centred in action, by promoting social uses (actions) of communicative tasks. That means that the student is considered a social agent, a member of society who has to develop specific tasks within real contexts as it is shown in the graphic:



*Graphic 2: A learner of languages*

*(own elaboration, based on the data from Moya, Albentosa and Harris 2006: 29)*

“Language use, embracing language learning, comprises the actions performed by persons who as individuals and as social agents develop a range of competences, both general and in particular **communicative language competences**. They draw on the competences at their disposal in various contexts under various conditions and under various constraints to engage in **language activities** involving **language processes** to produce and/or receive texts in relation to themes in specific domains, activating those strategies which seem most appropriate for carrying out the **tasks** to be accomplished. The monitoring of these actions by the participants leads to the reinforcement or modification of their competences”. (CEFR, 2001: 9)

This definition comprises the main idea of the CEFR which is: in the use and learning of languages both general competences and communicative competences are involved. These are:

- a) General competences of an individual:
  - Knowledge (*to know*)
  - Skills and know-how (*knowing how*)
  - Existential competence (*knowing how to be*)
  - Ability to learn (*knowing how to learn*)
- b) Communicative language competence (as seen with Hymes and then with Canale and Swain 1980):

- **Linguistic** (including lexical, phonological, syntactical knowledge and skills and other dimensions of language as system, independently of the sociolinguistic value of its variations and the pragmatic functions of its realisations).
- **Sociolinguistic** (it refers to the sociocultural conditions of language use).
- **Pragmatic** (it is concerned with the functional use of linguistic resources, drawing on scenarios or scripts of international exchanges).

Learners build their knowledge through interaction to the surrounding world. Students have an active role and are entirely responsible for their own process. Meanwhile, the teacher is a facilitator and not a provider of knowledge. The role of the teacher in the communicative learning can be summarized in four ideas:

- Allowing students' learning through communicative tasks.
- Helping students to develop strategic abilities so as to learn meaningfully through the performance of practical and communicative tasks.
- Fostering students' autonomy through self-assessment, or pair assessment, as well as allowing them to take decision.
- Lessons will be student-centred and not teacher-centred; therefore the curriculum must be flexible.

### 3.2.2. Foreign Languages Basic Curriculum Design: Aragonese Curriculum

According to Scott (2011) in general terms, “the main direction of English language teaching at all levels in recent years has focused on the importance of meaningful communication. This is reflected both in methodological developments and in the Spanish curriculum for foreign languages”:

*... the central point of the curriculum is formed by all the procedures guided towards the achievement of an oral and written communicative competence, in different meaningful social contexts, which allows students to express in a progressive, efficient, right way and which embraces all the possible uses and registers, including the literary one (Royal Decree 1631/2006).*

According to Finney (2002, p. 71), “the term curriculum is opened to a variety of definitions: in its narrowest sense it is a synonymous with the term syllabus, as in specification of the content and the ordering of what is to be taught; in the broadest sense it refers to every aspect of the planning, implementation and evaluation of an

educational program, the *why*, *how* and *how well* together with the *what* of the teaching-learning process”.

For Kelly (1989, quoted by Finney 2002) curriculum is “the overall rationale for the educational programme of an institution “. This definition includes the following:

- Intentions of the planners
- Procedures to implement the intentions.
- Experiences of the students after their plans.
- “Hidden” learning as product of the organization of the curriculum and school.

The Spanish curriculum, which establishes the *Minimum Teaching Requirements* for Secondary Education is based on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). “This document describes language competence in terms of linguistic functions or capabilities. These functions are expressed as *can do* statements and are organised by linguistic skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. These linguistic skills are in turn divided into different communicative functions, e.g. speaking: commercial transactions” (Scott 2011: 12).

Regarding the *Minimum Teaching Requirements*, they are divided into four main blocks. The first two blocks focus on communicative skills: *Block 1: Listening, speaking and conversing*; *Block 2: Reading and Writing*. The third block, *Language in Use*, “is aimed at an analysis and more formal understanding of the morphological structure of the foreign language and its points of comparison and difference from students’ first language”.

The Royal Decree 1631/2006 clearly states that *real situations will be the starting point from which to infer language usage rules*. This means that the use of the language in real situations is essential for its learning. The **Spanish Curriculum** proposes that the acquisition of the eight key competences is presented through communicative and task-based activities.

*The active role of the students is one of the conclusive factors in school learning processes. It is the learner who finally modifies and elaborates his/her knowledge schemata, building his/her own learning. In order to do so, the teacher will help the student activating his/her knowledge so as to allow him/her to relate previous knowledge and experiences to new contents, as well as the use of comprehensive memorization (section 12 Order of May 2007, Aragonese Curriculum).*

The Aragonese Curriculum states here a different approach to the one it had stated in previous curricula in which students were supposed to achieve the same

pieces of knowledge in the same order and at the same rhythm; now, a more **flexible** approach is required. “This greater flexibility is mainly determined by the idea that contents are not to be memorized but developed along the time through different situations” (Serrano 2011).

The subject “English Language” is shown in the curriculum not as a list of contents but as a group of interrelated competences that students – who are the main characters – learn in interaction to context. Contents will be acquired as the activities planned in the Course Plan are carried out.

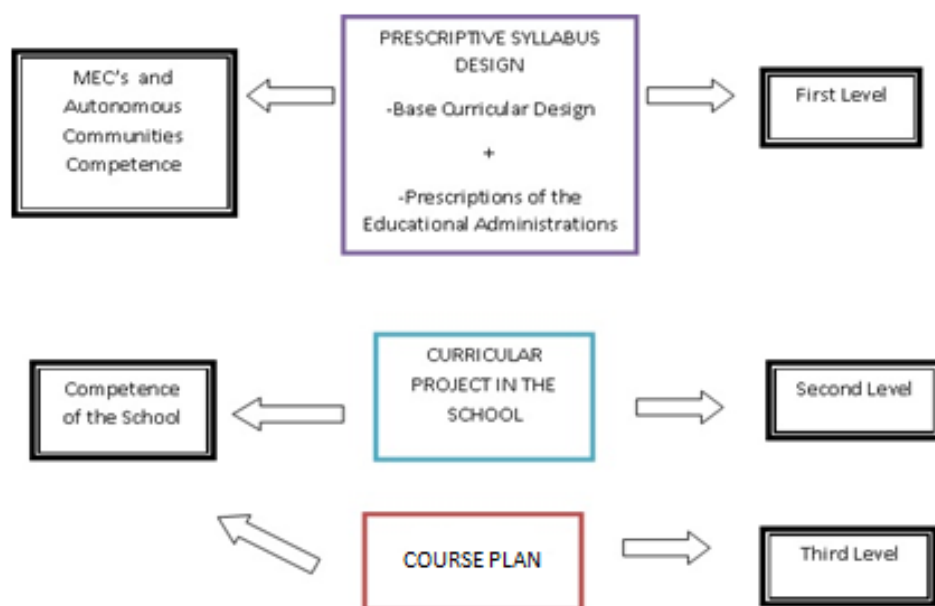
*Being the communicative competence the core to acquire learning, the subject will be structured in the development of four blocks of competences* (Aragonese Curriculum: 201).

- *Morphosyntactic competence: lexical grammatical and phonological aspects are to be studied.*
- *Pragmatic competence: sociolinguistic, discursive and functional aspect of the language.*
- *Procedural competence: intra and interpersonal aspects related to the getting to know yourself as the learner of a foreign language, personal attitudes, learn to learn, autonomy development and social abilities to achieve peer interaction.*
- *Intercultural competence: the ability to relate one culture to another.*

According to Serrano (2011), there are several methodological approaches which attach to the principles of the Aragonese Curriculum; among them, *Free Expression* (where the teacher acts as a driver and facilitator of the communicative process by proposing starting point –a picture, object or text – to allow communication in English without teaching linguistic contents first), *Task-based Approach* (which we have followed in the activities of our Learning Unit, as we will see next) and the *Process Syllabus* (which is centred in learning processes and is to be designed by both teachers and students).

To sum up, we can clearly distinguish three **levels of curricular concreteness**. The Aragonese Curriculum establishes a general prescribing frame which makes up the first level. This is open enough for each school to adapt it to its needs allowing teachers to design the School Curricular Project, which constitutes the second level. The Course Plan made by the teachers is the third level and will be written bearing in mind the planned objectives in the two first levels.

Regarding the Course Plan we designed in the module “Diseño curricular de lenguas extranjeras”, we took into account the competences, objectives and contents established in the Aragonese Curriculum as we will see in the following section.



*Graphic 3: Levels of curricular concretion*

*(own elaboration, based on the data from Nussbaum and Bernaus 2001: 119)*

#### 4. COURSE PLAN AND LEARNING UNIT: REFLECTION ABOUT TWO PRACTICAL PROJECTS

During our Masters Degree we have been writing several projects and pieces of work about different pedagogical and teaching aspects.

An activity which is going to be carried out must be planned properly before; so if as teachers we pretend the teaching-learning process to be carried out in an effective way, we should plan activities thoroughly, avoid improvisation, and make the most of the length of time dedicated to English teaching in Secondary Education –which is not much. This is the main purpose of the Course Plan and the Learning Units, which are included in it.

##### 4.1. COURSE PLAN (or Syllabus of Work): “ENGLISH” (2ND YEAR OF SECONDARY EDUCATION) (see Appendix “A”)

The Course Plan is the tool that the teacher uses to programme the way in which the elements of the curriculum (objectives, basic competences, contents, methodology and evaluation criteria) will be related, ordered and sequenced during the different Secondary Education levels in the short, medium and long term (Aragón and Universidad de Zaragoza 2012-2013).

When planning a syllabus of work, it is necessary to rely on the official curriculum “which provides the broad framework where the syllabus is constructed” (Scott 2011: 13). There is not a unique pattern of Course Plan; “traditionally, a syllabus of work for English language learning was based on the teaching of grammar (...) students used to work through a series of language structures starting with the verb *to be* and moved on through the different verb tenses and sentences structures”. But nowadays, grammar is not the final product of effective communication.

Currently, the Spanish curriculum (R.D. 1631/2006) and the Aragonese Curriculum in particular stand for a Communicative Approach. So, this means that they call for syllabus organization based on topics that promote communication. Regarding this Communicative Approach, correct pronunciation or producing grammatically perfect sentences is not what matters the most but rather whether the meaning is communicated or not.

This Communicative Approach, promoted by the Curriculum, is the one that we have been following when writing up our Course Plan for the subject “Diseño Curricular de Lenguas Extranjeras”. In order to elaborate the Course Plan, we have taken the document “Pautas para la elaboración de la programación didáctica en la etapa de Educación Secundaria Obligatoria” into account, which states that the Syllabus of Work carried out by the different Departments in the schools should include the following aspects according to the *Orden 9 de mayo, 2007*:

- Contribution of the subject to the key competences
- Objectives of the subject
- Contents of the subject
- Methodology (methodological aspects, resources, groupings, space, timing...)
- Evaluation (instruments of evaluation, grading criteria, evaluation of the teaching and learning process, evaluation of the Course Plan...)
- Differentiation
- Unit Plans (or Learning Units)

As we will observe next, we tried to include all these aspects in the elaboration of our Course Plan.

## **OUR PROJECT**

SOME EXTRACTS OF THE ORIGINAL PROJECT WILL BE ACCENTUATED IN QUOTATIONS

*Course Plan: English 2<sup>nd</sup> year of Secondary Education / Clara Alcalde de la Fuente; Marta Alegría Bernal; Iulia Bob Simonfi. Diseño Curricular de Lenguas Extranjeras: Inglés; Teacher of the subject: Violeta Delgado Crespo. 1<sup>st</sup> term. Year 2013-2014.*

This Project was written by the colleagues mentioned above and during the first



semester in the subject “Diseño Curricular de Lenguas Extranjeras”. As mentioned before, we made use of the document *Pautas para la elaboración de la programación didáctica en la etapa de Educación Secundaria Obligatoria* which was elaborated by professionals of the educative field in the Autonomous Community of Aragón with the aim of helping the future teachers (students of the Masters).

In order to elaborate this project, we had to approach the official documents in the schools. The most important ones are the *Royal Decree 1631/2006* which establishes the Spanish Curriculum and the *Order 9 de Mayo de 2007* that develops the Aragonese Curriculum. It is necessary to take these two documents into consideration to write the Course Plan – as we did. In addition, we also looked up the *Orden de 8 de junio de 2012* which modifies another previous Order regarding the instructions which regulate the organization and working of the public Secondary School in Aragón.

Based on point 3 of the article number 26 of the Aragonese Curriculum about the aspects which must be necessarily included in a syllabus and which have been mentioned before, our Course Plan is designed in the following way:

1. Contextualization: in this section we briefly described the characteristics of the school, the socio-cultural context and the characteristics and needs of the students. The course which we were writing for was the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of Secondary Education.
2. Syllabus Design and Development: First of all, it was necessary to refer to the **Organising Principles** and the **Epistemological Framework** emphasizing the cognitivist-constructivist theory which prevails over all the Course Plan (“it is related to the idea that students construct learning and knowledge for themselves, involved in a process of interaction and active learning”; “instruction should be centred on learners”, “according to Hein (1991), *constructivism if applied both to learning theory and to epistemology*, it means both to how people learn, and to the nature of knowledge”, etc.)

Afterwards, we referred to the **Acquisition of the key competences** set by the Aragonese Curriculum in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of ESO and the current Educational Legislation (Competence in linguistic communication, Learning to learn, Personal initiative and autonomy, Digital competence, Interpersonal and civic competence, Cultural and artistic competence...). Competences are cross-curricular and must not only be taught through English as a subject but also through all the other subjects set by the curriculum.

According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, the intention of our Course Plan is that students acquire communicative competence which includes the following competences: **linguistic**, **pragmatic**, **sociolinguistic** and **strategic**. The Aragonese Curriculum adds another competence to the list which we also took into account when writing up the Course Plan: the procedural competence, which focuses on learning to learn, development of learners’ autonomy, self-awareness

of the students and their interactions.

The elaboration of **Objectives** and **Contents** is fundamental when writing a Syllabus of Work. The objectives define what we are planning to achieve, it means that they are the “what for” of the process of teaching. According to Aragón and Universidad de Zaragoza (2012-2013), each subject in the curriculum presents some concrete General Objectives whose aim is to achieve the fulfilment of the key competences. There are no concrete objectives for each of the courses. In our Course Plan Design, we took the General Objectives (related to the **stage**: E.S.O.) of the curriculum into account, respecting its numeration and drafting. Regarding the contents of the curriculum, they are also clearly stated in the *Orden 9 de mayo, 2007*. The contents are the elements of the curriculum which constitute the direct aim of learning for students. In the current curricular design, they are an axis of integration and there is no more differentiation between the dimensions of concept, procedure and attitude.

The contents are grouped into four different blocks (1. Listening, speaking and conversation; 2. Reading and writing, 3. Language Awareness and reflection on learning; 4. Sociocultural aspects and intercultural awareness), which are clearly sequenced for each one of the courses. The contents are specific and prescriptive, so in the Course Plan, every single aspect of these blocks should appear. The task of designing contents is hard according to my point of view. In fact, in the case of our Syllabus Design, this was one of the mistakes that we made because we only covered 19 contents out of the 39 that are mentioned in the curriculum.

As we will see next, the specific contents stated for each one of the Learning Units of a Course Plan are highly related to these concrete contents for every level.

**Methodology** is defined as “the essential part of the curriculum because it constitutes the basis of the process of learning” in the document *Pautas para la elaboración de la programación didáctica en la etapa de Educación Secundaria*. Its purpose is the search for the best approach to make students acquire ways of learning. It could be defined as a compilation of criteria, principles and strategies that are selected and used by teachers to monitor educative action. It responds to the question *How to teach*” (Aragón and Universidad de Zaragoza 2012-2013: 83).

There is not a unique methodology. Teachers will be the ones who decide the most appropriate methods according to their point of view to teach English as a second language. However, the *Orden 9 de mayo de 2007* promoted by the Aragonese Curriculum points out some general **methodological principles** which are valid for all the subjects in the stage of E.S.O. and therefore, for our subject too. The most important requirement for Methodology is that it makes students achieve the **key competences** mentioned before (teaching should not only focus on the knowledge

itself but also on *knowing how to do* and *knowing how to act*). The main principles will be described next:

- a) The **active role of students** is one of the decisive factors because learners are the ones who construct their own learning. The teacher helps students to activate their knowledge by means of establishing relationships between prior knowledge and previous experiences and the new contents as well as focusing on comprehensive memorization.
- b) Importance of the **practical application** of the acquired knowledge.
- c) The **contents** will be presented in a structured way. It is important to help learners to organize the new information in a meaningful way.
- d) There should be an emphasis in promoting activities which allow students to process information (**meaningful activities**).
- e) Use of ICTS and new technological tools.
- f) **Students' participation** should be boosted by developing a relaxed environment in the class and by ensuring moments of collaboration among learners. There should be a balance between individual work and cooperative work.
- g) The curriculum should be **flexible** by taking students' interests, needs and abilities into account.

Regarding these orientations established by the Curriculum, we took the necessity of an **active methodology** in our class of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of Secondary Education into consideration, in order to promote students' meaningful learning by means of open and motivating tasks in the Learning Units to favour students' creative way of thinking.

In addition, our Course Plan possesses clear evidence showing that the teacher's role cannot be directive but illustrative. This means that the teacher should become a piece of the process of learning and not the most important one and that he/she should monitor and help out students when necessary. Furthermore, in the section of Methodology, **working in groups** is also worthy of mention (big and small groups and work in pairs). In the same way, we also referred to the organization of the space and the timing during the year. Finally, another important aspect to be included in the section of Methodology is **motivation** (when starting the lessons, incentives while teaching, when ending up with the Units, etc.)

After tackling Methodology, we focused on **Evaluation** and **Differentiation** which are the last sections of the Course Plan.

**Evaluation Criteria** can be defined as a precision of the stage objectives and it is

essential to guarantee an objective evaluation. They are required to be as concrete as possible in order to facilitate teacher's function when determining the level of the acquisition of students in their process of learning.

In our project, we divided this section into four different ones: *Approaches and instruments of evaluation*, *Grading Criteria*, *Evaluation of the teaching and learning process* and *Evaluation of the Year Plan*. However, after looking over our project again that was developed during the first semester of the Masters, I realized that the Evaluation Criteria of the Aragonese Curriculum were not clearly specified. Yet we know that they should always appear in the Course Plan.

The Evaluation Criteria are settled on **indicators** (which are always formulated in the Infinitive). Each one of them must be associated with one or more than one key competence/-s. In a proper Course Plan, Evaluation Criteria contained in the curriculum must be included as indicators. In fact, it should also be specified which Unit will concretely develop which part of the Criteria. Indicators should express what students "must know" and "must know to do" in a clear way.

The most common way of using the Evaluation Criteria is by fulfilling it during the Learning Units where the teacher establishes the concrete indicators for each part according to the contents of the Units. Then every concrete indicator for the Learning Units can be related clearly to the Evaluation Criteria established by the curriculum. In the Course Plan document, it is important to remark the indicators which are considered as **minimum requirements** (in case a student does not accomplish them, he or she will have problems during further processes of learning).

The procedures and evaluation tools to assess students' progress are varied (observation scales, class diaries, students' projects, specific tests, questionnaires, records, etc.), but all of them lead on from the Evaluation Criteria. Furthermore, it must be said that Evaluation should not only take final results into account but also the progression during the whole teaching-learning process. A very useful evaluation system for teaching Languages would be **Rubrics**. Its purpose is to help teachers to give more accurate, objective and fair feedback to their learners. In fact, a Rubric proposal was designed by us when designing our Learning Unit which we will explain afterwards.

Undoubtedly, the **European Language Portfolio** cannot be pushed into the background because it is an essential document when talking about the teaching of English Language. This Portfolio's aim is to encourage students to learn more languages during their entire lives, to ease mobility across Europe and to assist understanding and tolerance among European cities. In fact, the sub-section called *Evaluation of the teaching and learning process* of our Course Plan includes the European Language Portfolio as an assessment, self-assessment and data collection tool in the process of learning a language.

The Evaluation Criteria, which are going to be applied, must be very clear in

order to dismiss doubts about a teacher's objectivity. As it can be deduced of everything exposed before, this section of the Course Plan is one of the most complicated ones. In fact, it was one of the sections where we made more mistakes in our Course Plan Design in comparison to the other ones.

The proposed **materials and didactic resources** are described in a general way in the Course Plan, by means of pointing out the concrete resources which are going to be needed in each Learning Unit or Unit Plan. As our Course Plan advocates meaningful learning, the choice of the didactic resources was made according to a communicative approach (videos, flashcards and so on). However, there was a remarkable improvement regarding material selection and creation when writing the Learning Unit as it will be explained next.

In addition, materials to be used in cases of **differentiation** (for reinforcement) should also be determined in such a piece of work. We referred to Differentiation in our Design Course Plan, by means of showing flexibility to adapt contents to students' necessities. In our hypothetical class of 2<sup>nd</sup> Secondary Education, there was a student with high capacities who required supplementary material to develop her own capacities.

As a conclusion, the Aragonese Curriculum also refers to the importance of the **use of ICTS** in the different subjects. This is the reason why interactive whiteboard and informatics were present in order to correspond with the demands of our Course Plan. The **weak points** of our Course Plan mainly concerned formulating specific contents for some of the Unit Plans and the manner in which the general Evaluation Criteria was formulated (not very clear and concise). Their formulation should have been more precise.

3. Unit Plans: A Course Plan is normally composed by 12-15 Learning Units, but our teacher considered that our Design Course Plan should be composed by 9 Units due to the extension of the project. Each Learning Unit is composed by the following sections: *Timing, Learning Objectives, Contents (for each one of the four blocks mentioned above), Learning Outcomes, Key and specific competences, Assessment Criteria, Values across the curriculum, Resources and materials, Activities.*

In the Unit Plans that we designed, we found some difficulties when formulating some **objectives**. Sometimes we confused objectives with contents, a mistake that we have corrected when designing our Unit Plan or Learning Unit for the subject *Diseño, Organización y Desarrollo de Actividades para Lenguas Extranjeras* during this semester. However, the indicators of the Evaluation (Evaluation Criteria) in the Units were formulated in a better way in the Unit Plans rather than in the general section of our project regarding Evaluation.

In the following section, we will explain our Learning Unit in depth relating it to

the Course Plan.

#### 4.2. LEARNING UNIT: “LANDING IN SCOTLAND” (see Appendix “B”)

A syllabus is usually divided into **units of work** or **learning units**. Within each unit of work, all the different components of the syllabus should be present so that the work is systematically, and evenly distributed throughout academic year. The theme for a unit always stands in the centre of planning processes. (Scott, 2011: 16)

In our case the subject “Practicum II” was carried out in the Official School of Languages 1 (Zaragoza) in the level 1<sup>st</sup> Advanced, so this is the reason why the Learning Unit developed within the subject “Diseño, organización y desarrollo de actividades para el aprendizaje de Inglés” was planned for this level. In the beginning I doubted whether or not to comment two projects directed towards two different stages and educational fields in our final dissertation because the Course Plan that I reflected on was aimed at the 2<sup>nd</sup> course of Secondary Education.

However, I do not consider the element mentioned above as a difficulty when writing this dissertation. Even though, our Learning Unit was aimed at the Official School of Languages educational field, I strongly believe that the majority of the knowledge acquired during the Masters degree could be found as part of this project. In fact, the first project provided us the basis to do the second one and enabled us to improve the weak points. Because of these reasons, we finally decided that it was necessary and convenient to tackle the two projects mentioned before (Course Plan and Learning Unit). Besides, the choice of these two pieces of work is a good opportunity to see the temporal learning progress, as both of them were carried out in different terms of the Masters: the first and the second terms respectively. Another positive aspect that should be stated is that the fact of elaborating the Course Plan for the Secondary Education and the Learning Unit for the School of Languages has given us a wider vision of the teaching process in different educational stages.

Learning about these two stages has made us discover the differences and similarities existing in both cases. The implementation of our Learning Unit during the placement period in the School of Languages made us reflect on the importance of proper planning when teaching. This project will be addressed and explained in more detail in the following paragraphs.



#### OUR PROJECT

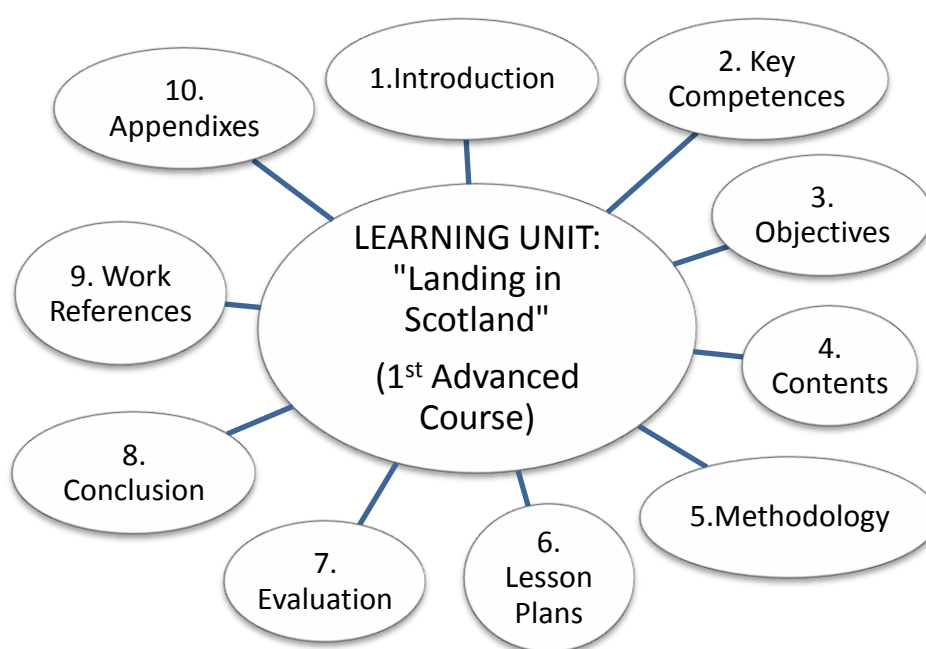
EXACT EXTRACTS OF THE ORIGINAL PROJECT WILL BE ACCENTUATED IN QUOTATIONS

*“Landing in Scotland”: Learning Unit 1<sup>st</sup> Advanced Course, Official School of*

*Languages 1, Zaragoza / Clara Alcalde de la Fuente; José Luis Lou Bosque. Teachers of the subject: Enrique Lafuente Millán, M<sup>a</sup> José Luzón Marco. 2<sup>nd</sup> term. Year 2013-2014.*

One of the first steps when designing a Learning Unit is to observe the current **LEGAL FRAMEWORK** and to take its considerations into account. As we were developing our teaching practice period in the Official School of Languages (1<sup>st</sup> Advanced Level), we followed the *Orden de 7 de Julio de 2008 de la Consejería de Educación, Cultura y Deporte*, in which is established the teaching of foreign languages for Advanced levels in the region of Aragón as well as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The **Communicative Competence** clearly appears in the Official Document for the Advanced Courses in Schools of Languages with its three components: linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences. These three communicative abilities are also present in our Learning Unit.

The sections of our Unit Plan are composed by **ten different epigraphs** as it can be observed in the following graphic and its title ("Landing in Scotland") was not an easy choice as we will explain next:



*Graphic 4: Structure of My Learning Unit (own elaboration)*

Deciding a topic for the design of our Learning Unit was quite a tough task, as we did not know how to structure our ideas at the beginning. We were thinking about designing a conciliatory Learning Unit whose axis was a concrete topic (a trip to Scotland) but we did not see clearly how to set out the different lessons. In addition,



we wanted to design a too general Unit of Work as we were thinking of tackling different countries and cultural aspects around the world. Thanks to the indications of our teacher of the subject, we finally clarified our minds and we realised that it was a better option to focus on one concrete country and the possible experiences that our students could live in such a real situation (travelling to Scotland to study an English Course). We finally reached an agreement about the title (*Landing in Scotland*) and the structure of our project.

Regarding the **ORGANIZATION** of the Learning Unit, it is formed by 4 different sessions. As we were two persons designing the Learning Unit together, we were asked to design 8 different sessions. In the School of Languages, lessons last 2 hours and a quarter so we designed **4 different sessions** with four determined topics as the axis of our Unit: *Travelling to Scotland*, *British Education*, *Jobs in Scotland* and *Living in Scotland*. We wanted our students to follow a logical process in order to follow our choice of topics. In order to do so, we planned for students to feel like they were about to live in Scotland. All the activities proposed reflect real life situations: for instance, booking plane tickets, a role-play activity where students are supposed to talk to an Administrative Officer about the conditions and availability of different English courses, etc.

On the other hand, our Learning Unit also contributes to the development of the **KEY COMPETENCES**, stated by the Aragonese Curriculum. Although these competences before mentioned do not appear specifically in the Official Document on Advanced Level of School of Languages in Aragón, we also took them into account because we did consider that they are necessary in every kind of educational process. These competences are **cross-curricular** and they appear throughout the whole Learning Unit. Regarding the key competences mentioned above, the **linguistic communication competence** in the Unit is highlighted in the activity based on the job interview in which students have to perform while pretending that they are trying to get a job; the **digital competence** is found in the activity of booking a flight ticket using the Internet; **learning to learn competence** and **interpersonal and civic competence** contribute to students becoming increasingly independent and autonomous in life as well as fostering both interaction among students as well as the achievement of another key competence, the **autonomy and personal initiative**. All of these competences are developed during our Learning Unit in the following activities: debate on the topic about cuts and reductions found in the lesson on Jobs in Scotland, three short readings about certain stereotypes, encouraging our students to search for more information about them and so on. The **cultural and artistic competence** is also developed through some of the activities included in the fourth session *Living in Scotland*; and even the **mathematical competence** is developed by means of an



activity concerning Scottish coins and notes.

All the **OBJECTIVES** and **CONTENTS** in the Learning Unit are based on the Curriculum for 1<sup>st</sup> Advanced Course in Official School of Languages (*Orden 7 de Julio de 2008, por la que se establece el currículo de nivel avanzado de las enseñanzas de idiomas de régimen especial reguladas por la Ley Orgánica 2/2006 de 3 de mayo de Educación, que se imparten en la Comunidad Autónoma de Aragón*). The formulation of our Objectives was notably improved from the Course Plan to the Learning Unit. In the first project, some of our objectives were vague and not clear enough. Even though when writing the Learning Unit, we found a difficult task to formulate proper and specific objectives (i.e. “To describe different flight companies”). To the extent that making progresses with the project, we gradually improved their formulation by writing them in a more concrete and clear way (i.e. “To describe the pros and cons of different flight companies taking into account prices, timetables, luggage conditions and comfort”).

As we have already indicated above, one of our main difficulties when writing the project was to provide our objectives and activities with a communicative approach and developing the four skills in our students’ learning process at the same time. We do believe that we have achieved that ambitious aim because all the activities designed in our Learning Unit include the four skills, the Key Competences and even the **fifth skill** added by the Aragonese Curriculum, which is **spoken interaction**.

The most significant aspect that we took into account when starting the design of our Learning Unit was that the **METHODOLOGY** should follow the **Communicative Approach**. We learned about its importance while attending our Masters classes. “The methodology used is learner-centred following a Communicative Approach”. Consequently, the four lessons of the unit contained activities that our students found similar to real life situations (i.e. learning to argue one’s opinions, job interviews, asking for information abroad and so on) (see [Appendix “B”: appendices 7, 12, 16, 18, 20](#)). With this type of activity, we tried to prepare them for different contexts. According to our point of view, offering our students real life situations and using authentic material related to the topic may be very useful for them. Throughout our Unit Plan, we tried to recreate situations that learners will likely live in future situations when trying to travel somewhere or even if they go to a foreign country to find a better job.

As we already indicated when referring to the methodology used in the Course Plan design, “we do understand that students are the centre of the process of learning English. So, teachers should be kind of facilitators of knowledge trying to encourage students to look further information about the topic shown in the different lessons

throughout the whole Unit”.

When designing the Learning Unit, we felt that we were prepared to carry out the task, because after writing up the Course Plan during the first semester, we had a wider variety of knowledge and academic training. This does not mean that we did not have doubts or that we were able to write it without any difficulties at all. In fact, one of the toughest tasks was to supply the Unit a common **nexus** as we have already indicated (everything relating to Scotland) which worked as the axis of all the activities which had to be communicative on one hand and meaningful on the other hand in order to teach and learn English Language through its four skills: oral comprehension (listening), written comprehension (reading), oral production (speaking) and written production (writing).

In order to teach **Listening** and **Speaking** we took Richard’s (2008) thoughts into account. One of the most difficult tasks for students is **Listening**. The teacher must keep in mind that two different kinds of processes are involved in understanding spoken discourse: *bottom-up* and *top-down* processing (Richards, 2008). We do know that understanding is a constructive process which depends on the text/audio provided but also on the context, information and previous knowledge of the receptor. Situational or contextual knowledge are also factors which influence auditory input.

Obviously, in the case of a lack of previous knowledge about the language, it would be difficult to understand the spoken input. In real-world listening, both bottom-up and top-down processing generally occur together. Therefore, comprehension would include both bottom-up and top-down processing at the same time. Listening activities proposed in our Learning Unit took these facts into account.

According to Fields (1998, quoted by Richards 2008: 10) a typical lesson in current teaching materials involves a three-part sequence consisting of pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening and contains activities involving activating prior knowledge, making predictions, and reviewing key vocabulary.

For instance, in the implementation of the activity “Students watch three videos about different Universities in Scotland” (see **Appendix “B”**: **appendix 10**) of our Learning Unit, students primarily (**pre-listening**) had to make predictions from the audio that they were about to listen to (they were shown some pictures and they inferred which University they would probably like the most) and review key vocabulary; in the **while-listening** phase which focuses on comprehension (students took notes while watching the video; and in the **post-listening** phase, learners had to give their opinions about the most appealing University to study in their opinion (both listening and speaking skills were developed in this stage). Post-listening phase typically involves a response to comprehension and may require students to provide opinions about a topic.

The development of this skill leads to various difficulties, so it is important that we, as teachers, help students to understand the English Language. In the implementation of our Learning Unit in one of the 1<sup>st</sup> courses of Advanced level which we were attending during our teaching practice period, we needed to have several things in mind: that it was necessary to use the English Language as a means of communication in the classroom within a meaningful and real context; that it is important to create an atmosphere where students feel comfortable and not frightened; that listening activities may focus on meaning rather than on obtaining all the details of the conversations (for example, in a video about cuts and reductions in Scotland where students have to extract the main points of the audio) (see Appendix “B”: appendix 21)

Everything that we have suggested for Listening activities should be applied to **Speaking** activities too. The teacher should create a suitable atmosphere to make students feel comfortable so that they are not afraid to express themselves. Anxiety and a climate of insecurity can easily block the processes of learning. So the teacher should organize the teaching process by giving all the learners the chance to speak. In order to fulfil this goal, it is essential to give a high priority to work in couples as well as to promote work groups. This way, all students may have both an opportunity and a necessity to speak.

With the aim of promoting interaction in the Course Plan design and in the Learning Unit, we have planned meaningful activities which foster students’ speaking skills by focusing on tasks which must be carried out with the language as the main focus. According to the three types of **speech activities** differentiated by Brown and Yule (1983) and Richards (2008), we have introduced *Talk as interaction* activities in our class by means of teacher-student and student-student conversations (social relations); *Talk as Transaction* activities (importance of the message) which would correspond to role-play and Group Discussions activities in both our Course Plan and our Learning Unit; and finally *Talk as Performance* activities (public talk) like students working in groups in order to write a brief report on the University Educational System that they do prefer and subsequently explain the reasons out loud to the rest of the class.

Along with listening and speaking activities, **Writing** and **Reading** are the other two skills which have been developed through the activities proposed in our Learning Unit. In both cases, the choice and design of our activities aimed to get our students’ understanding of the real use of these activities as well as the importance of the English Language. Our intention was to plan all the activities as **real** (i.e. activity of an application form to apply for an English Course in Scotland (see Appendix “B”: appendix 12), to write an e-mail to the head manager of a bank to open a bank account there (see Appendix “B”: appendix 23), and so on), **attractive** (i.e. to write a trip diary entry about the first night in Edinburgh (see Appendix “B”: appendix 28), and **useful**

(i.e. our proposal of elaborating a list of things to take to the trip to Scotland) (see **Appendix “B”**: [appendix 8](#)) possible.

In fact, our design of **Reading** activities has had the purpose of improving students’ reading skills as well as their reading competence. Besides, they also have had the aim of improving their linguistic competence by means of introducing vocabulary and grammatical structures.

When it came to **grammar and new vocabulary**, we tried to avoid designing old-fashioned activities which are aimed at learning off by heart and repetition but to offer activities which make students learn in an inductive way because grammar and vocabulary should not be taught as solitary topics. Tasks should work as a vehicle to offer the possibility of inferring grammar and vocabulary by using language in a communicative way; however, there are obviously some occasions where students’ difficulties might oblige teachers to explain some grammatical issues in a more traditional way. Thus, we have tried to avoid strictly grammar-focused activities in our Unit Plan but we also considered that it was necessary in a way, so we tried to integrate it within the communicative purpose of our Unit. In our Learning Unit, we proposed one activity where students were asked to write a brief report on the University System that they prefer, either Spanish or Scottish by including *I’d rather...* / *I’d better...* (see **Appendix “B”**: [appendix 16](#)) and another one which stimulates students to practice Phonetics by presenting a street in Edinburgh with different shops and jobs which respond to different phonetic symbols. (see **Appendix “B”**: [appendix 19](#))

It is necessary to talk about **CLASSROOM ARRANGEMENT** too because it is essential when teaching a foreign language. We have been talking about the importance of working in groups “to boost interaction by contributing to a better, more active and participative work dynamics as well as to the communicative approach”. (Gómez Hurtado and García Prieto 2014: 230).

So, why is it a good idea to organize work in groups in the classroom? According to Brown (2007: 225), “the advantages of group work are that it helps to solve the problem of classes that are too large to offer many opportunities to speak”. Another advantage is that it enables a learner-friendly climate where there are communities of learners promoting cooperation in pursuit of common goals, what increases motivation in students. In addition, working in groups also promotes learner’s responsibility and autonomy because it places responsibility for action and progress upon each of the members of the group somewhat equally. Finally, “group work is a step toward individualizing instruction” because it might help “students with varying abilities to accomplish separate goals” (Brown 2007: 226)

So after taking this into consideration, it seems quite clear that working in

groups promotes cooperative learning. Our opinion is clearly favourable to the organization of students in groups and to the development of participative activities as stated and demonstrated through the Course Plan and the Learning Unit. As a matter of fact, most parts of the activities proposed were implemented in our teaching practice period in the Official School of Languages in groups or in pairs (i.e. “students will be divided into two groups...”, “after the debate, students will work in trios”, “in these groups, students will have to write the pros and cons...”, “students will fill it in pairs” as if they were going to apply for that course, “they will perform the role-play in pairs”, etc.)

Without a doubt, it also becomes essential to increase students’ motivation when teaching a language. Regarding **MOTIVATION**, it is important to reflect on Gardner and Lambert’s studies about this topic as we have been doing during the Masters Degree. The studies of Gardner and Lambert on motivation in the field of second language acquisition research have been basic in order to understand the importance of motivation in the teaching-learning process of a language. Motivation is certainly not the same when referring to School of Languages’ students compared to Secondary Education ones. In general terms, Secondary Education students’ profile corresponds to adults who want to or need to learn English Language because of several reasons, although they all normally have an **extrinsic motivation** such as promotion at one’s workplace, good grades and so on. This extrinsic motivation can be a good reason for learners in the School of Languages to enrol in an English class. The subject is imposed by the current curriculum for a teenager of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of Secondary Education, so the extrinsic motivation might be to get good marks or even to learn the language to go abroad. Fact is that students in Secondary Education whom our Course Plan was aimed at would probably not have a highly developed extrinsic motivation. This is the reason why our main task as teachers should be to improve our learners’ **intrinsic motivation** in both cases –School of Languages and Secondary Education- by catching the attention and interest of students by means of communicative activities like the ones proposed in both projects that we have been reflecting about.

Regarding the concept of intrinsic motivation, we were aware of the importance of fostering it when designing our activities and materials. This was the only way to achieve a meaningful way of learning. Students become much more receptive and willing to learn when the tasks present a challenge and they are motivating. In addition, they know that the learning process depend on him/herself so the motivation is steady and long-lasting.

Undoubtedly, when students have a reason and a stimulation, their attention is increased and hence their efficiency too. “The principal way that teachers can influence learners’ motivation is by making the classroom a supportive environment in which students are stimulated, engaged in activities that are appropriate to their age,

interests and cultural backgrounds, and most importantly, where students can experience success". (Lightbown and Spada, 2006: 185)

According to Crookes and Schmidt (1991, quoted by Nussbaum and Bernaus 2001: 104), we also consider the fact of taking care of aspects such as planning, design of materials, choice of activities and feedback and evaluation as a fundamental key to achieve motivation. During the Course Plan and while designing the Learning Unit, we considered that the materials (we used own elaborated materials and also some authentic materials –that we adapted- extracted from real resources: newspapers, brochures, videos and so on) are attractive and appropriate for the age of 2<sup>nd</sup> Secondary Education students. The implementation of the Learning Unit has corroborated that the activities in groups might foster both students' cohesion and cooperative learning. In addition, if they are varied and attractive, as we have intended them to be, they may awake students' interest. Furthermore, like we did as teachers in our teaching practice period, we also tried to provide feedback to learners in order to keep and increase their attention while carrying out a determined task and not only when finishing it.

According to my point of view, it might also be essential to propose a **constructive assessment**, as we have tried to do during our projects, in order to stimulate and motivate students to go ahead by means of participating in class activities with no fear to be wrong as the mark in the exam would not be the only aspect to be assessed.

In the elaboration of our Course Plan, we have already explained the different kind of **EVALUATION** that we would use for our group of students according to the Evaluation Criteria of the Aragonese Curriculum. We have talked about **formative** and **summative** evaluation. Summative Evaluation is the most common and traditional one.

Personally, we are in favor of the formative evaluation because it helps students to be aware of how they learn as well as of the aspects that can be improved. Besides, this way of evaluation can be carried out during the whole academic year. However, it is also very important to follow the criteria established by the curriculum and to evaluate in a summative way to be able to inform all the members of the school community about the progression of every single student. So, it might be essential to do the assessment with varied tools to evaluate in an objective way and not only by means of a criterion. Questionnaires, interviews, notes, observation sheets, self-assessment sheets, portfolios, tests and so on could be used in the process of evaluation.

In our Learning Unit, we have mostly used the following kinds of **assessment tools**:

- First of all, our proposal of an innovative evaluation should be remarked. As the four skills of English Learning must be assessed, we have designed two **Rubrics** covering the productive skills. This means, writing and speaking, and also the spoken interaction skill. The Rubric for Writing can be used for every sort of written activity throughout the Learning Unit. This Rubric will be used by both teacher and students (**Peer Assessment**) in order to get all the data to assess students in full detail. (see Appendix “B”: LEARNING UNIT - page 27)  
The Rubric for Speaking will be used by the teacher in all the students’ spoken interventions. (see Appendix “B”: LEARNING UNIT – page 32)
- Concerning the Listening and Reading activities, the teacher will use the **data collected** about different activities performed in class according to the criteria established.
- Observation and collecting data will be enough for the Listening and Reading skills.
- **Feedback** for students will be given in two ways. One way describes the material that has been collected by the teacher and given back to the students with positive and negative feedback. Another kind of feedback will consist of presenting the whole class the common mistakes found in the process of evaluating different activities.

**Self-assessment** might also be very important to make students concerned about their process of learning. For instance, in the lesson 4 of our Learning Unit, skills such as Speaking and Writing will be checked by the students. They are asked to work in groups and it is a very good opportunity to evaluate these skills and the interactive behaviour of the students when being in a group.



## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS FOR FUTURE

From my point of view, the Masters Degree has opened the doors to our professional careers as teachers. Although we have learnt a lot about methodology and on how to apply it to our teaching practice, there will still be a lot to learn regarding teaching after finishing our degree. One of my conclusive thoughts after studying is that – as Kumaravadivelu (2012) said – we cannot imitate the model of the passive expert teacher, but we have to dominate the teaching practice in a creative way.

All that we have learnt – such as linguistic theories, methods, curriculum, assessment and even the practice periods in schools – are going to help us tremendously when we begin our teaching practice, but it is our task to discover the 'connection' among all of these factors.

As Kumaravadivelu stated, we must become individuals who are able to make decisions and improve ourselves, hence we must develop our professional, procedural and personal knowledge; analyze the students' needs, motivation and autonomy; recognize their identities, beliefs and values; teach by theorizing and conversing and watch and monitor our own educative actions.

In essence, we will have to achieve a comprehensive training which allows us to fully understand what is happening in our classrooms, allowing us to generate and apply our own pedagogic knowledge depending on the context.

We, as future English language teachers, must establish a connection between the word and the world. The classroom cannot be understood as an isolated place. Teaching a language is much more than teaching a language.

Pedagogy must be local and according to the context. What is taught cannot be the same everywhere, even within the classroom when different groups of students are involved. We were referring to all these aspects in the previous epigraph when tackling differentiation and the fact of all students being different.

I would like to elaborate my **future proposal** regarding three aspects which are related to what has been mentioned above. I will talk about the necessity of having a flexible curriculum, making the assessment process flexible and therefore, the role of the flexible teacher who is closely related to the process of Reflective Teaching.

The communicative language teaching approach might be the most adequate approach to be applied to the English Language teaching regarding the **flexible curriculum** – as seen during the Masters. Taking this into account, the curriculum should be communicative too. According to Finney (2002: 77), “a communicative



curriculum puts an emphasis on process and product as well as it is focused on the learning itself and in the integration of the different aspects of the design process. So, the syllabus provides the framework, but learning ultimately depends on the interaction between the teacher and learners in the classroom, and on the teaching approaches, activities, materials and procedures employed by the teacher. (...) The emphasis is on using the language in stimulating communicative activities”.

From my point of view, as future teachers it is necessary to work on the flexibility of the curriculum (and hence, also in programming, learning units and lessons) by adapting them to the necessities of every single student and personalizing the teaching process by doing so. Of course it is not an easy task because it requires a big effort from the teacher who should know the context of the classroom perfectly to achieve this adaptation. However, despite its difficulty, it is necessary to take it into account as future teachers. The adaptation should be carried out when planning the objectives by taking the individualities of the classroom into account and the activities should be programmed with different levels of competence and difficulty.

A further aspect is the **assessment process** and I think that it is necessary to use varied tools as we have indicated throughout the project. If we want assessment to respond to the individualities, we might have to use different procedures to gather information about each student. This is a fundamental aspect which I would like to keep on working on in the near future. Assessment is not developed sufficiently in the English Language teaching in our country because students’ capacities are still assessed through exams and tests which are not related to the real use of language in daily life. The assessment tools should be used to obtain individualised information from every single student with formative aims (formative assessment) and also summative aims (summative assessment).

A reflection: we do know that teachers are supposed to give students a mark in a certain way because it is imposed by the educational system. But if we, as teachers, do not want that our students’ motivation and self-confidence break down, we should not use the assessment to sanction because students may feel disappointed. This dilemma is complicated for the teacher and it requires a deep reflection on his/her behalf. Some authors (Weir 1993, quoted by Nussbaum and Bernaus 2001) think that the way to solve this conflict –unless partiality- could be to adopt summative assessment systems which take information collected for each student into account in the processes of formative assessment.

According to that previous reflection, my **future proposal** to improve the current assessment system is to develop assessment tools (with formative aims) which could make communication between teachers and students easier. Some of them such as Peer Assessment, Rubrics and Portfolios have been used in our Course Plan and the Learning Unit and I would like to keep on doing research about this topic in the future.

All in all we have been talking about making the curriculum and the assessment flexible. Logically, this leads to the idea of a **reflective and flexible teacher**. According to Zeichner and Liston (1996: 11), “a reflective teacher examines and attempts to solve the dilemmas of classroom practice; he/she is aware of and questions the assumptions and values he or she brings to teaching; he/she is attentive to the institutional and cultural contexts in which he or she teaches; he/she takes part in curriculum development and he/she is involved in school change efforts and he/she takes responsibility for his or her own professional development”.

Zeichner and Liston (1996: 47) describe the five following dimensions of reflection: 1. **Rapid reflection** (immediate and automatic reflection-in-action), 2. **Repair** (thoughtful reflection-in-action), 3. **Review** (less formal reflection-on-action at a particular time), 4. **Research** (more systematic reflection-on-action over a period of time) and 5. **Re-theorizing and Research** (Long-term reflection-on-action informed by public academic theories).

This idea has awakened my interest during the development of my Masters studies and I would like to go into detail about it in the near future. In fact, during the implementation of my Learning Unit “Landing in Scotland”, I realized how important the first and the second levels –Rapid reflection and Repair- are when I had to change some aspects of my teaching during the lessons to improve the working of the class (**reflection-in-action**). In the same way, I also reflected on my teaching practice just after the lessons took place –Review- and in fact it is something that I keep on doing now that time has past after finishing my teaching practice period –Research-. Hence, I would like to do the same when I become a teacher (looking for my own way of teaching) “by critically examining my practical theories and by considering these theories in light of public academic theories” –Re-theorizing and Reformulating- (Zeichner and Liston 1996). These three last dimensions of reflection respond to the term **reflection-on-action** which is about the process of reflecting before or after teaching.

Which final conclusion could we extract from the elaboration of this Action Research Project?

“Second language learning is facilitated when learners are engaged in interaction and meaningful communication” (Richards 2006). The most adequate approach for teaching, as we have discovered in the Masters Degree and demonstrated in this dissertation- might be the communicative approach. The CEFR, Spanish Curriculum and Aragonese Curriculum stand up for this methodology. An English teacher should bear in mind that activities will probably work better if he/she follows the Communicative Approach, as we have tried to show during this Action Research Project.

Our role as teachers should be to try to teach as facilitators who create a learner-friendly atmosphere in the classroom (motivation) to learn the language, by giving students opportunities to practice the language in real contexts and situations.

In conclusion, according to Richards (2006: 23), my main objective will be to achieve the following situation: “the classroom is a community when learners learn through collaboration and sharing”.

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## 7. APPENDICES

### 7.1. TABLE OF CONTENTS

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